DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 415 083 RC 021 353

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TITLE	Stabilizing What? An Ecological Approach to Language Renewal.
PUB DATE	1997-00-00
NOTE	19p.; In: Teaching Indigenous Languages; see RC 021 328.
PUB TYPE	Information Analyses (070) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*American Indian Languages; Community Action; *Discourse Modes; *Language Maintenance; Language Standardization; Native Language Instruction; *Sociolinguistics; Story Telling
IDENTIFIERS	Critical Literacy; *Indigenous Knowledge Systems; Intergenerational Transmission

ABSTRACT

This paper develops a speaker-centered view of language as an alternative to the monolithic decontextualized abstractions favored by modern linguistics, and suggests the application of the speaker-centered view to indigenous language renewal. The paper contends that the modern notion of languages as homogeneous stable "things" that are taught, learned, and used--a concept deeply embedded in linguistic theory--is fatal to the goal of revitalizing indigenous languages. Language, like an ecosystem, is by its very nature dynamic and ever-changing. In contrast, the speaker-centered perspective asserts that people and their actions are inseparable, recognizes that language is an integral part of people's interactions with each other and their environment, and distinguishes between primary and secondary discourse. Primary discourse is dialogic and immediate, has rules that are tightly integrated with nonverbal experiential knowledge, and is not standardized. Secondary discourse aspires to authority and permanency and need not bear any relationship to things that people actually do and know. Seen from this perspective, indigenous languages and the standardized dominant languages that threaten to engulf them are not as similar as linguists would have us believe. The point of language renewal is not to make indigenous languages resemble standardized ones, but rather to restore the balance between primary and secondary discourse, and with it the balance between people and nature that indigenous communities had once perfected. Successful language renewal requires the interweaving of critical literacy in the dominant language with local knowledge and living relationships expressed through the local indigenous language. Contains 43 references. (Author/SV)

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Stabilizing What?
An Ecological Approach to Language Renewal

Mark Fettes

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Saluton. Kia la lingvo, tia la spirito.
Ke ambau pacigu aj fortigu per nia kunestado.

This paper develops a speaker-centered view of language as an alternative to the monolithic, decontextualized abstractions favored by modern linguistics. Successful language renewal requires the interweaving of critical literacy in the dominant language with local knowledge and living relationships expressed through the local language. The stabilization of indigenous languages forms part of a broader movement to reestablish societies on a human scale and in balance with nature.

ED 415 083

For my doctoral dissertation in education, I have been developing a way of thinking about language that can make sense both of my own experiences as an Esperanto speaker[1] and of my work with Canadian First Nations people on community-based language strategies.[2] In the context of the theme of the Fourth Annual Stabilizing Indigenous Languages Symposium "sharing effective language renewal practices," this means asking about the meaning of the words *effective*, *language*, and *renewal*.

The second of these terms is the most central and the most problematic. When we talk about language, we often fall back on the ways linguists have chosen to describe it—in terms of discrete entities defined by standard grammars, standard dictionaries, standard phonologies, and the like. But that does not really capture what language is. The closer you look at people's linguistic

[1]Esperanto is a century-old language designed and developed for use between people with different mother tongues, in a similar way to North American trading languages (Chinook Jargon, Mobilian, and so forth). The best description of its functioning is in French (Piron, 1994); see however Janton (1993) or Richardson (1988) for an introduction in English.

[2]I have worked as a consultant on language and education issues to the Assembly of First Nations and other groups since 1992 (see e.g., Fettes, 1992 & 1997). During this work I encountered Joshua Fishman's ideas on "reversing language shift": see Fishman (1991) and his two papers in the earlier Symposium publication, *Stabilizing Indigenous Languages* (Fishman, 1996a, 1996b). The present paper develops an alternative theoretical model that, while in some ways critical of Fishman, relies on many of his insights.

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behavior, the less "standard" it becomes. To take an example from my own experience, what looks like "Dutch" from the viewpoint of a non-speaker becomes a constellation of stylistic norms for the learner of the "standard," a shifting mosaic of regional and class-based varieties, which when observed in their social context are a subtle ever-turning kaleidoscope of individual and group speech patterns of speakers going through their daily lives. There are no linguistic techniques available, there is not even a vocabulary, to capture the fact that "Dutch" refers to all these things at once—to an entire ecological system of communicative strategies rooted in time and place, history, and the land.[1]

What, then, are we trying to "stabilize" or "renew"? What does it mean to stabilize an ecosystem, which by its very nature is a dynamic, ever-changing set of interrelationships rather than a clearly identifiable "thing"? One influential response is to make the ecosystem more "thing-like"—more homogenous and predictable by establishing standards, printing dictionaries, and writing textbooks and curricula. *Teach* people how to speak. Linguists tend to feel very comfortable with this approach as it fits with all of their training.[2] Yet I contend that the modern notion of languages as homogenous, stable "things" that are taught, learned, and used—a concept deeply embedded in the grammar of Western languages and in linguistic theory—is fatal to the goal of revitalizing indigenous languages.

First, if languages constitute a class of things, then they resemble one another in essential respects. Given this premise, it is hard to escape the conclusion that one language must be as good as another for most purposes. Indeed, structuralist linguistics has elevated this avowedly empowering principle into something of a dogma. One even finds it embedded in the work of sociolinguists like Joshua Fishman (1991), who in *Reversing Language Shift* refers to minority and majority languages by the letters X and Y, as if they were as alike and interchangeable as two symbols in an algebraic equation. I do not think that Fishman subscribes to this fallacy in a conscious and deliberate fashion, but its influence has systematically infiltrated his work and that of many others. Far from being a help to advocates of language renewal, it undermines their cause by suggesting that languages are no more than tools to be picked up and put

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[1]The most penetrating philosophical critique of standard linguistics has been developed by Roy Harris and his co-workers (Harris, 1981; Davis & Taylor, 1990). The links between language, land, and spirituality, that are so obvious and fundamental for many indigenous language activists, are only just becoming accessible to the Western tradition (Maffi, 1996).

[2]See Mühlhaüsler (1996) for a description of how objectifying ideologies have influenced the linguistic description of the Pacific region and of their effects on local linguistic ecosystems. The historical roots of this tradition are traced in Illich (1981).

down, or sets of clothes that one may or may not choose to wear, with no further social or environmental effects.[1]

Secondly, from the idea that all languages are fundamentally alike, we are readily led to believe that the same factors that entrench English (or other languages of ruling) can be used to stabilize indigenous languages. Besides a misplaced emphasis on writing, standardization, and teaching, this also tends to link linguistic activism to various forms of nationalism and territorialism—zero-sum ideologies that can awaken fiercely negative reactions on the part of linguistic majorities and be hugely expensive to maintain in both human and economic terms. If we are serious about creating a world where thousands of languages can thrive, rather than just a few dozen or a few hundred, then other models must be found.[2]

Thirdly, if every language is merely a local instance of a general phenomenon, then any community's knowledge about its language appears insignificant in comparison to the Western linguistic tradition. Linguists claim to have been studying the languages of the world for centuries and therefore to know far more about their workings and significance than any mere speaker. This perspective privileges modern linguistic techniques for abstracting language from its social context, rather than techniques for re-embedding it. The particular and concrete use of language in knowledge, culture, and interpersonal relationships is largely ignored in favor of a focus on linguistic structure and "language" in general.

Fourthly, if languages are seen as "things" separate from their speakers, then the latter cease to have a sense of ownership and control. Particularly for non-fluent adult speakers, language renewal comes to seem an impossibly huge task in which they have little if any role to play. Consequently linguistic responsibility is entrusted to teachers, linguists, and various other people in institutional roles, rather than being reaffirmed as a shared value of every member of the community. Depending on the circumstances, such institutionalization may actually deepen and entrench people's alienation from their language.[3]

I believe that we can meet the challenge of language renewal only by abandoning the initial assumption. Forget about the monolithic, abstract entities that modern science projects upon the linguistic world: a theory of language renewal must begin with the speakers, with people "doing language" together

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[1]For the modern "enlightened" view of all languages as equal and alike see for example Newmeyer (1986). The logical conclusion that language loss does not really matter very much is argued by Ladefoged (1992). A rebuttal is provided by Dorian (1993).

[2]The most extensive work on fostering stable multilingualism has focused on linguistic rights (Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson, 1994; Léger, 1995, 1996). For a profound indigenous perspective on language and government see Henderson (1995).

[3]This is especially true if the institutionalization is in schools that are already viewed by indigenous people as alien (see for example Peshkin, 1997).

in meaningful ways, and work out from there. This paper presents a preliminary exploration of the terrain. I believe the results to be very compatible with what Elders and language activists say and do; in addition it demonstrates the inadequacy of one-track approach such as schooling and literacy alone. Most importantly, perhaps, this exploration helps us rebuild a vision of language in its full social context, as an instrument of love and oppression, rootedness and alienation, knowledge and lies.

The two sides of language

Our "speaker-centered" perspective begins with the assertion that people and their actions are inseparable and that a true understanding of the latter must include the actors' own description of their actions and motivations. This perspective abandons the Cartesian notion of an invisible mind disconnected from the "doing" body in favor of "the social mind"—the mind that exists through concrete physical and symbolic interaction with others. Such interaction, now commonly termed "discourse," is given coherence through informal rules of behavior learned by trial and error. Discursive psychology, which seeks to reinterpret our understanding of all human behavior along these lines, undercuts the Cartesian idea that language is something separate from other areas of human activity. Instead language is seen as an integral and central part of the ways people interact with each other and their environment.[1]

However, because language works through words—symbolic goods that resemble material goods in their stability and transportability—it is operated on by two very different kinds of discursive rules. *Primary* discursive rules govern the ways we negotiate meaning in face-to-face settings. When we adapt our speech to particular people, situations, and purposes, we are making use of primary discursive rules that are tightly integrated with all our non-verbal knowledge about the world of experience. This is how language is first acquired: mutual and constantly renegotiated references to things and events in our immediate environment (and in our behavior) give meaning to our earliest words and structure our most important early relationships. The dialogic and immediate use of language in primary discourse becomes deeply embedded in our cognitive functioning and underlies our capacity to use language for other goals.

Being both dialogic and immediate, such "vernacular" or "informal" language has no need of standardization, and indeed resists it mightily. Its nature is to be mercurial, fluid, and ever-changing, according to the needs and creative urges of its users. In contrast, *secondary* discourse aspires to authority and permanency—to "truth" and "knowledge" of a lasting kind. Primary discourse enables us to tell stories about the world we know from experience. Its situated

[1]That is, the mind of every individual is a kind of finely-tuned discursive processor, constantly working to ensure the stable and productive integration of a unique complex of discourses. On discursive psychology see Harré & Gillett (1994); on discourse and language see Gee (1991), as well as Bakhtin's (1981, 1986) prescient work of forty to sixty years before.

"small stories" make use of communicative strategies that are deeply rooted in everyday life. But the words and word-use rules produced in this way are then available to be strung together into more complex and abstract stories about the world outside our experience, including past and future. This process starts early. Even young children are busy assembling a conceptual model of the world at the same time as they use language to negotiate their wants and needs with people around them. But it is the adult world that places greatest stress on secondary discourse, with far-reaching consequences.[1]

As Dorothy Smith (1990) has pointed out (extending an argument from Karl Marx), the way in which concepts (words) are strung together in secondary discourse need not bear any relationship to the things people actually do and know. This implies that language is a dangerous tool indeed, for secondary discourse has a clear effect on primary discourse. People may abandon or modify their rules of behavior to conform with those stories that appear most "true" or those that they wish were true. But there is no guarantee that the results will be what they expect. They may have been seduced by "ideology," in Marx's sense, rather than a valid picture of their material and discursive reality. Thus, cohesive and sustainable communities must achieve a dynamic balance between primary and secondary discourses, one that allows language to continue to evolve through its use in informal situated negotiation of ways to live together, even as this negotiation is influenced by ongoing attempts to integrate these complex patterns of life into the relatively restricted conceptual systems that language makes available. [2]

Seen from this perspective, indigenous languages and the languages of ruling that threaten to engulf them no longer appear as similar as linguists would have us believe. Indigenous languages are the product of hundreds or thousands of years of delicate, gradual accommodation between the primary and secondary discursive systems of particular human communities, living in a sustainable relationship with particular places and ecosystems. It is no accident that indigenous languages vary so greatly within and among themselves. This is to be expected of any healthy linguistic system where primary discourse still holds its own. By contrast, English and other standardized languages of ruling are the recent inventions of a cultural system drastically alienated from its en-

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[1]For two quite different but complementary descriptions of how secondary discourse works, see Turner (1996) on how storytelling structures language and Feyerabend (1975) on storytelling as the universal form of knowledge production.

[2]This view of language is a synthesis of many sources within and outside the reference list, with Smith (1990) providing a key insight. The primary/secondary distinction was formulated by both Bakhtin and Gee along somewhat different lines. Here, all language acts are viewed as drawing on both primary and secondary discursive rules, although this paper also uses "primary discourse" and "secondary discourse" to refer loosely to language acts dominated by the former or the latter.

vironment. What Ivan Illich (1981) refers to as "taught mother tongue" began its relentless standardizing march across the Atlantic in 1492, a year that saw the beginnings of the colonization of the Americas from without and the colonization of Europe from within.[1]

Over time, as Illich has argued, "standard language" reduces the scope of primary discourse in a society to a minimum. Language ceases to be something that can be negotiated and adapted to the needs of a specific place and situation. It becomes an objectified, authoritative "thing" whose supreme authorities are the Book and the Expert. Words and concepts are expropriated from their social context and anchored in disciplinary secondary discourses that claim a monopoly over truth. The objectification of language parallels the objectification of nature and of people themselves: indeed, it does not seem accidental that the philosophical foundations of modernity—the Cartesian mind-body split, the Baconian ideal of abstract science, the Comenian notion of lifelong education—were laid at the very time that standard language was beginning to replace the vernaculars among the educated classes of Western Europe.

We can now reassess the third term in our declared goal of "effective language renewal." The point is not to make indigenous languages resemble standard ones (with the potential result, as Dick Littlebear suggested, that in another couple of generations we could be meeting to discuss the oppressive dominance of Cheyenne). Language renewal is about finding ways to restore the balance between primary and secondary discourse, and with it the balance between people and nature that indigenous communities had once perfected. By the same token, language renewal is not something that should concern indigenous people alone, nor is it simply a matter of elementary justice. It is one attempt among many to reestablish control over a runaway civilization (Sachs, 1992, 1993).

The triple braid of language renewal

So let us turn, at last, to the first word in our mission statement: what are *effective* language renewal practices? A healthy language can be visualized as a tightly woven braid of many primary and secondary discourses. In living and working together (primary discourse), people refer to the stories they share as a common source of knowledge, and in telling and retelling those stories (secondary discourse), people draw on their years of shared experience, of doing things together with and without language. Woven together, these two forms of discourse enabled indigenous languages to evolve and made them of unrivaled value to their speakers.

Today we are a long way from the hunter-gatherer condition of semi-isolated, self-sustaining family groups. Now every indigenous community whose

[1]As Illich's essay makes clear, the decline of indigenous languages around the world is simply a continuation of the process by which Standard English and other objectified languages of ruling have obliterated or weakened local vernaculars in their countries of origin.

language is under threat is exposed to a tangle of non-indigenous primary and secondary discourses—practices and stories grounded simultaneously in ancient discursive systems inherited from the European peoples and the social systems of modernity. In trying to remake the language braid, indigenous communities must refashion their own language to accommodate a changing way of life and develop new stories to replace the objectifying and disempowering "truths" propagated in the invading language.

We can think of this process as a "triple braid" of language renewal, one still more complex and difficult to weave than the classic double braid. For it can no longer involve the indigenous language alone. The secondary discourses of English and any other language of ruling constitute a force for colonizing the mind that must be directly resisted, not simply ignored. As long as the only stories told in the invading language are ones of racism, alienation, exclusion, economics, individualism, and so on, they create a discursive space that leaves no room for more than one language, and it is the local language that will eventually fall. Different stories need to be told in the invading language itself, which leave room for multiple identities and local forms of knowledge. This paper itself develops one such story. There are many others to be told.[1]

This perspective of the triple braid suggests that any community, no matter where its language is at, should work simultaneously on all three strands, as described below. This may seem like too much to demand, and I do not claim that it is easy. But to focus on just one or two strands is to neglect a key element of language renewal; while to work on all three strands at once is to weave something that will last. Elements of this multidimensional approach can be found in Joshua Fishman's *Reversing Language Shift* (1991). However, I believe that his stage-by-stage approach effectively obscures the complexities of belief and practice involved. Rather than assessing the linguistic health of a community on demographic grounds alone, as Fishman and many others propose, we must focus on the health of each discursive strand and the ways in which they interweave.

Strand one: Critical literacy

The first strand of language renewal does not depend on the indigenous language itself at all. It is the task of confronting, marginalizing, and dismantling the secondary discourses of alienation carried by the invading language. Critical illness, here, is the state of a community whose members see themselves as powerless to change their lives; whose families are being destroyed by abuse; and whose leadership, whether in the fields of politics, health, educa-

[1]The implicit claim is being made here that secondary discourses are the levers of language shift. Primary discourse in any language is always additive, providing another module of situation-specific skills for the mind to use. For this reason, primary discourse in the invading language is not a factor in language renewal work. Space precludes a fuller theoretical description of language shift here; the topic will be further explored in my dissertation.

tion, social welfare, or whatever, is locked into distant, impersonal structures and meaning systems. And the healing process has to start by people coming together to share their pain, to name their oppressions, and to seek their own solutions. Linguistic oppression is only one of many forms of suffering, neither greater nor lesser, but an integral part of an entire ecology of disempowerment.

The principal means of identifying intrusive secondary discourses is to ask people what they believe. It seems to me that many language activists understand this intuitively, for one of the most frequent topics in this Symposium was surveys of the attitudes that people hold towards their language. In one such study, an Apache, Bernadette Adley-SantaMaria, told us that some tribal members view the language as evil, as contrary to the teachings of the Bible. Such a discourse will doom a language in the long run, unless you can either marginalize it or replace it with a different, language-friendly one. In another session, Octaviana Trujillo told us that many Yaqui parents are still convinced that learning the native language will prevent their children from learning good English. As long as that discourse is operating—and again, this is an objectified, ideological discourse with deep roots in Western colonialism—then you are not going to be able to bring the language back, either in schools or outside them.

So, the first strand of language renewal consists of identifying these discourses, demythologizing (de-objectifying) them, and replacing them with others. Enormous though the task is, there are two bright threads in this strand of the braid. One is that many of these alienating discourses are common to virtually all oppressed peoples, so that there is enormous potential for sharing knowledge and strategies and developing common opposing discourses of empowerment. The second is that such opposing discourses can draw selectively on concepts that hold considerable power in the dominant society: concepts of freedom, of justice, of human rights, of anti-racism, of community, of sustainability, and so on [Both of these threads are woven together in the work on language rights done by Skunabb-Kangas and Phillipson (1994) and Léger (1995; 1996)]. One very concrete recommendation I would make is that all language activists look closely at the curriculum of their schools. What kind of vision does it present of the world and of your people's place in it? If the vision is one of a homogenous society dominated by economics and technology, and your people's place is peripheral or invisible then that vision must be changed before the language will have a chance.

Educators will recognize this process as a variation on "critical literacy," as pioneered by Paulo Freire and further developed by many people, indigenous and non-indigenous, around the world. Critical literacy can be practiced in the school, but it can also be an important component of adult training projects and various other kinds of grassroots social work. It teaches people how to filter the discourses to which they are exposed, spot hidden forms of manipulation, and develop alternative accounts in which their own experience is central.

Language renewal desperately needs this work in order to succeed.[1] But it also requires the introduction of a new element: the idea that indigenous languages hold the key to local authenticity. This brings us to the second strand.

Strand two: Local knowledges

The second strand to be rewoven is that of secondary discourse in the indigenous language. It may seem paradoxical to work with secondary discourse even when primary discourse (Strand Three) is extinct or critically ill, and indeed Joshua Fishman has warned us in no uncertain terms about the dangers of focusing exclusively on what he terms (more narrowly) the institutional domain. But this strand is essential to motivating and extending language use. Primary discourse by itself does not supply a sufficiently rich linguistic environment to keep its speakers happy; even young children are avid for stories, filled with questions, and thirsting to know what their elders know. In order for primary discourse to thrive, the knowledge and the stories in the language must again become part of the community's common heritage. In critical cases this process must begin with the smallest meaningful elements: words and names.

It will already be clear that Strand Two can readily be interwoven with Strand One. For example, arguments for the importance of local, community-based knowledge can be linked to the reintroduction of specific indigenous words for local realities, or the authority of non-indigenous sources can be undermined by "translating" their impersonal and monolithic discourses into more human and concrete terms in the local language. Where and how the process starts, however, will be highly dependent on the cultural and social practices of the community. Religious or, more broadly, spiritual discourses seem often to hold on to the language longest; they may also be where it can also most readily be brought back. Names can provide another focus of resistance; even changing the name of the tribe or community may be a small step towards language renewal. Traditional knowledge of family relationships, hunting, fishing, agriculture, plants, and animals can still be powerful and relevant for community members. In a further extension, formulaic expressions and ceremonial texts can be deliberately reintroduced in appropriate settings, including everyday acts such as greetings, welcomes, introductions, and so forth.

Eventually, however, any community committed to language renewal must confront the issue of discursive complexity—the problem of developing and transmitting a web of stories attuned to local experience. Stability can neither be achieved by means of isolated words and formulas nor by reproducing objectified discourses in the local language. In other words, translating textbooks unchanged from English to Inuktitut is inadequate for language renewal, and,

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[1]An accessible guide for language activists is also desperately needed. In its absence, the basic reference is Freire (1970). Shor (1992) gives an updated treatment for educators; Lankshear and McLaren (1993) provide an interesting collection of theoretical perspectives; McLaughlin (1994) considers the implications for American Indian education.

in the long run, it probably will ease the shift to English. The local language has to be used to meet its speakers' need for concepts and stories that make sense of the world *in their terms*. So storytelling is crucial, in the broad sense used here. Traditional myths and historical accounts; stories about people's relationship with the land and with nature; contemporary tales of despair and hope, love and death; poetry, jokes, songs, poems, and so on. Every good story is another reason to cherish the language, another branch on the fire to keep it burning.

Stories of this kind were once the prerogative of Elders and oral performers. Today the traditional storytelling settings have been overwhelmed by the avalanche of invasive secondary discourses pouring in through books and magazines, radio and television, and compulsory state schooling. While critical literacy can help stem this flood, it is equally necessary to develop new settings for storytelling, ones in which the invading language is at best on equal terms and preferably at a disadvantage. Wilderness camps, Internet chat groups, songwriting workshops, and multimedia works making use of indigenous art are some of the possibilities. Ofelia Zepeda's well-known work on developing O'odham poetry is another outstanding example (see for example Zepeda, 1996).

Literacy and schooling have long preoccupied language activists, and such a focus was much in evidence at this Symposium. It is an understandable one, given the role that texts and schools play in disseminating secondary discourses. But knowledge *about* language can all too easily become a surrogate for knowledge *of* language, and debates on orthography and literacy can hinder their use to communicate knowledge and ideas—can in fact undermine ownership of the language.[1] Indeed, evidence is accumulating that all forms of language acquisition involve mastering discourse—both primary and secondary—rather than learning words, grammar, and writing systems as independent categories. It is therefore not surprising that indigenous language activists report success with discourse-centered approaches, ranging from the Total Physical Response techniques espoused by Dick Littlebear (Model, 1996), through the classroom use of texts reported in a previous Symposium by Norbert Francis and Rafael Andrade (1996), to the Centro Editorial en Lenguas Indígenas in Oaxaca, Mexico, where fluent speakers develop a writing system over the course of a few weeks of composing extended texts in the language (Bernard, 1992).

Nicholas Faraclas (1993), writing from Papua New Guinea, provides a particularly convincing account of critical literacy and language stabilization working together. The hundreds of indigenous languages scattered among the mountains and valleys of this rugged island are, of course, totally excluded from the official Western-style education system. Most have no more than a thousand

[1] The two-edged nature of modern linguistic discourse is illustrated by a poem that was read at the session on the American Indian Language Development Institutes, in which participants expressed the idea that "we are the enemies of our language." In a speaker-centered approach to language renewal such a thought would be impossible: one would speak of dispossession and the struggle to regain what was stolen.

speakers. Yet the movement that Faraclas documents has involved hundreds of communities in developing and beginning to use their own writing systems, often in a matter of days or weeks. How is it done? First, communities control the entire process. Second, Strands One and Two are tightly interwoven: the critical literacy process leads immediately into communities developing their own stories about their world, in their own language—first in discussion and later as texts. Third, the forms of the written language are taught in complete separation from its use in storytelling, and often by different teachers. In one class, learners practice "word attack" skills, spelling, and so forth. In the other, they tell stories, which in the beginning can be recorded by the teacher or an advanced learner and then can be read back and further developed by the class.

The Papuan approach can work well for languages whose primary discourse is still vital. Where it is not, Strand Three of the language braid must be rewoven as well.

Strand three: Living relationships

The third strand of language renewal is the one that Joshua Fishman (1991) made the focus of his book on reversing language shift, his "Stage 6": "the interaction of children and their parents or other affectionate socializers in natural, daily, home-family-neighborhood-community life." While still the most elusive and neglected element in language renewal and the most difficult thing to turn around in communities that have generally experienced very severe trauma, it can also be the most powerful. Recall Dick Littlebear's comment in his post-banquet speech on "rare and radical ideas"—that one brief conversational exchange with a student made an entire term's teaching effort worthwhile. "I understood him, and he understood me—it was perfect," he said. That is what primary discourse is about.

Much of what Fishman writes about informal language can stand unchanged as a description of primary discourse. I believe, however, that he underestimates the ability of motivated adults to acquire and integrate a new language into their daily life and overestimates the determining effects of the home on children's language patterns. To be sure, home-based immersion in the language is a worthwhile goal, but *it will not by itself lead to language renewal*, nor does it exhaust the possibilities of primary discourse. Rather, any meaningful long-term relationship conducted in the language helps to establish an intergenerational network of relationships, which clearly at some stage should involve children but which may not reattain the stage of stable transmission as a first language for years, possibly even generations.

Some methods of recreating primary discourse are well known. The Maori language nests, *kohanga reo*, focus on the grandparent-infant relationship; they have inspired similar programs around the world. The Californian master-apprentice program involves establishing strong relationships between Elders and adult learners in the ancestral language. For fostering primary discourse between adult peers, we can turn to the less well-known Maori movement, *te aatarangi*, which involves intensive training of adult speakers, both in immer-

sion camps and in urban settings, even on the workplace floor, by volunteer teachers. These programs, like any successful language renewal project, involve all three strands of the language braid; critical literacy and local knowledge are used to provide both the motivation for the recreation of primary discourse and the substance of much of what is done in the language. If such supports are in place, much more can be done. For instance, I am not aware of indigenous programs to foster parent-child bilingualism or language use among teenagers, although both could clearly make an important contribution.[1]

One of the greatest pitfalls in primary discourse renewal, however, is its inherent resistance to standardization. The reweaving of the language braid will not produce the old language, as the Elders remember it and speak it. If it is successful, a new language will arise, one with deep roots in its traditional heritage but equally reliant on the urge of its speakers to use the language for everyday purposes and in everyday contexts far removed from the traditional ones. This can be disappointing, even disillusioning, for those who see the old language as something sacred, a rock of stability in a sea of confusion. But the dilemma cannot be escaped. A commitment to primary discourse requires a willingness to accept and foster change.[2]

From the point of view of language renewal, use is far more important than form—unlike in traditional communities, where use could be taken for granted. This can mean developing a new secondary discourse about the language, in order to make primary discourse accessible for as many people as possible. Dick Littlebear, again, hit the nail on the head in his post-banquet talk. Do not be too critical of language learners, he said; don't be too puristic about grammar or pronunciation. That is something that can be very hard for fluent speakers to do, particularly if they are influenced by modern linguistics and its affinity for standard language. However, our stories about language renewal have to put discourse first. Get your learners to take ownership of the language, to use it for their own purposes, to start building relationships through it; then work on the details.

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[1]Fishman (1991) is an excellent source of information and commentary on Strand Three programs. On language nests, see also Fleras (1987) and Smith (1992). Hinton (1994) describes the master-apprentice program along with many other Californian language initiatives. For *Te Aatarangi*, mentioned in Fishman (1991), my main source is a personal encounter with Te Ripowai Higgins, a longtime language activist who now lectures in Maori Studies at the University of Victoria, Wellington, New Zealand. Nicholson (1990) describes adult Maori language retreats held at Maori culture centers.

[2]Issues of this kind are very much in evidence in Israel, regarding the purity of spoken Hebrew, and New Zealand, regarding Maori. Although poor teaching is often blamed for these developments, I believe that they follow unavoidably from the reintegration of the language in contemporary primary discourse. Management of this transition is no easy task.

Further implications of an ecological approach

The theory of linguistic ecology sketched here can shed light on many other facets of language renewal. By way of illustration, let us take the three issues raised by Barbara Burnaby (see Burnaby, this volume) in her plenary address to the Symposium on Saturday morning. Drawing on many years of working with Canadian First Nations communities, Dr. Burnaby suggested that solutions to this trio of problems could be essential to developing sustainable strategies for language maintenance.

The first was the problem of local control and critical mass. Can the solutions that work for large language communities such as the Navajo also work for small, isolated communities of a few hundred people? Is there some level of institutional complexity that needs to be attained in order to keep a language program vital and evolving? What does this mean for language renewal in small communities?

If primary discourse alone were enough, or if secondary discourse remained under the exclusive control of the community, critical mass would not be a factor. Historically, very small family groups were able to develop and maintain distinct language varieties because their entire discursive world contributed to the task. Every story, every communicative act reinforced the importance and value of that variety. But today, indigenous languages have lost forever their monopoly on community discourse, and, as I have made clear, primary discourse alone is not enough to keep the local language at the center of local meaning and communication systems. Storytellers and knowledge-makers are needed for a language to survive. And this is why numbers are a real issue. The smaller the community, the greater the proportion of its people that will have to be involved in storytelling and knowledge-making. Yet the time and skills available for this work are limited and always vulnerable to co-option by the non-indigenous world.

The most hopeful factor for small language communities is that secondary discourses travel. Perhaps indigenous storytellers can find ways to support each other and enable smaller communities to profit from a much greater creative pool. Translation is still needed, but translation is faster than creation. I am thinking not only of writers of various kinds (novelists, poets, songwriters, and others), but also of indigenous philosophers, teachers, scientists, and of course Elders, who combine all of those roles. Perhaps in this age of the Internet it will be possible to develop rapid ways of exchanging stories between communities and sharing them on a wider scale than was ever possible before. The great challenge will be to ensure that this does not happen through the medium of English (or other languages of ruling) alone, but involves indigenous languages front and center.

In her second point, Dr. Burnaby noted that most and perhaps all successful language programs hinge on strong, charismatic leaders, typically women. Why is this? Where do they come from? How do we foster them?

If we think of the discursive world of a healthy, authentically self-governing linguistic community as a triple braid, we can also think of each individual

in that community as weaving their own braids, each a microcosmic variant of the whole. We recognize as leaders those whose own discursive braids represent a compelling model of authenticity—a revelation for others of what they and their community could become. I suspect that most leaders of this type are women, because primary discourse—the world of emotions, relationships, and the flexible negotiation of meaning—lies at the heart of language and authenticity, and women, whether for reasons biological or cultural or both, often possess far greater skills than men for negotiating and cultivating this world. This hypothesis needs testing through ethnographic studies of such leaders; however, we can briefly explore its implications for language renewal.

If women indeed tend to be better weavers of Strand Three, then perhaps language activists, in developing new settings for informal language use, should look to the needs and aspirations of the women of their communities. Not only daycare centers, but parent and family support groups, women-only literacy and health groups, classes in traditional crafts, and career- and education-related networks for women can provide nurturing settings for primary discourse to flourish. Language activists also need to identify family dysfunction as a linguistic problem as well as a social one. The looser the bonds of relationship, the more likely it is that community members will be swept off their feet by the flood of non-indigenous secondary discourse, leading eventually to the loss of language. Conversely, the stronger are a community's ties of family and friendship, the more widespread will be the traits of strong leadership, reducing the pressure on isolated individuals and enabling the community to respond creatively—and authentically—to change.

Dr. Burnaby's third problem, negativity, was exemplified by a dedicated language teacher who refused to share her materials with others. In similar vein, in papers to earlier Symposia, Joshua Fishman (1996b) spoke of a "death wish" that can capture languages and their speakers; while Michael Krauss warned of "denial" as being "the most important barrier that impedes the stabilization, revival, and maintenance of our languages" (1996, p. 21). Are these fears well-founded? What pathology triggers negativity, death wishes, and denial, and how can it be cured?

Let us think again of how knowing subjects use language in discourse to organize their experience of the world. The very phenomenon of a stable subjectivity is based on our ability to reconcile conflicting discourses, or avoid them entirely. Yet speakers and teachers of endangered languages typically struggle with alienating secondary discourses in the invading language, day after day, in a primary discursive context that may be severely restricted. One wonders when Dr. Burnaby's selfish language teacher last laughed in her language? What emotional hurdles must she overcome every time she sees the language of the heart imprisoned in classroom and textbook? The solution she has adopted is to let go of Strand Three altogether—the most personal, painful, threatening strand. Leave the language in the books; become an Expert guardian of its secondary discourses. In the same way, in many communities, Elders may refuse to speak their language with younger people or berate them for

using it incorrectly; teachers may focus on rote learning; and fluent adults may pretend that they do not know the language. All of these decisions contribute to unraveling the language braid.

If such flights are to be halted, ways must be found for even small numbers of speakers to *enjoy* using their language together. In *Reversing Language Shift*, Joshua Fishman writes that language festivals and language evenings are deceptive, because people enjoy them so much that they may forget that nothing has changed. But something does change, if a language is no longer heard only at funerals—the situation Rangi Nicholson so graphically described for Maori at the Symposium. *By themselves*, festivals are not enough. Yet the triple braid tells us that one approach is never enough. Only when woven together can the strands endure.

In closing, I want to return to the title of this paper, which speaks of an *ecological* approach to language renewal. In part, ecology is being used here as a metaphor for the way in which language is enmeshed in a discursive environment of unimaginable complexity and for the dynamics involved in the play between primary and secondary discourses. However, I believe it to be more than a metaphor. Language evolved in human communities where personal experience, social organization, and knowledge of the world were tightly interwoven. The spread of standard languages has advanced our (objectified) knowledge of the world immensely; but by the same token, it has also been inextricably linked with the twin evils of social alienation and environmental destruction. The link between language and wholeness, between language and the sacred, is felt in similar ways around the world; it can only be maintained by telling and sharing stories rooted in time, place, and relationships. Turn language into an artifact, export it on a massive scale, and reified concepts and objectified discourses will soon begin to cover up local meanings like asphalt.

The language renewal movement thus forms part of a much broader movement towards reestablishing societies on a human scale and in balance with nature. Once again, many Elders and language activists know this (recall Evangeline Parsons Yazzie's tale of the deer mouse and the hantavirus in her opening address). "Our language is in everything we do," I heard often at the Symposium. What this means is that the choice of the languages we speak is also, inevitably, a choice about the kind of life we and our children will live and the kind of world we will create. I hope that the theory introduced here will help us to choose wisely and to build well.

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